

The Sharecroppers' Voice

"The Voice of the Disinherited"

OFFICIAL ORGAN SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS' UNION

Vol. 1, No. 10

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CONVENTION TO HEAR NOTED SPEAKERS

A Message To The Young Methodists

The officers and members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union wish to extend to you their greetings as you assemble in Memphis for your convention. We sincerely hope that this great gathering will be epoch making and that it will stir Methodism and Christianity generally as never before.

The Methodist Church has a grand tradition of heroic struggle against tyranny and oppression. Many of their leaders have been brave champions of social justice and righteousness. There are similar champions among your leaders today.

Today men around the world are engaged in a great struggle against poverty, insecurity, ignorance, unemployment, war and a host of other injustices, trying to build a world of peace and plenty where the stupidities and brutalities of this world will be done away with. Youth must face the question of how he will use his life in this struggle.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is seeking to end the terrible exploitation in the cotton fields of the South. A few days after your convention in Memphis the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union will hold its second annual convention in Little Rock. To this convention will come the actual producers of cotton, the sharecroppers, tenant farmers and day laborers of the South. These men are the most exploited agricultural workers in the United States. They have not even rights such as peasants had acquired in the middle ages under Feudalism. They are as cruelly exploited as the coolies of China and their standards of living are no higher. There are more than 8,000,000 of these disinherited men, Negro and white.

In the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union the Negro and white farmers have found strength, fellowship and courage. They have found something in their struggles together in the Union for justice and a decent and full life that they have never found in any other organization. Not even the church has assisted them in their efforts to secure a decent living. Often enough the Church has stood by and looked on while these disinherited men were ground down by their overlords.

We ask you in the name of justice and decency, in the name of the Carpenter of Galilee whom you profess to serve to raise your voice against the oppression and tyranny that stalks the cotton fields of the south and deliver thousands of innocent men, women,

continued on page two

"YOU WILL WIN" Says Southern Woman

December 15, 1935

Dear Sharecroppers and Friends:

This letter comes to you from a writer in New York who heard some of your organizers when they were speaking here last winter, and who is now giving herself the "Christmas gift" of sending a small check to you.

Though a resident of New York I am a Southern woman. I was born in Mississippi and spent my youth there and all my traditions are Southern. My father was a Congressman for years from Mississippi (he is now dead), and though he would scarcely endorse all I am going to say in this letter, he did have the interest of the poor, struggling cotton farmer much at heart. Always I can remember his speaking bitterly of peonage as I understand it a condition not much worse than some of you have to endure.

I want to say to you that I am heart and soul with you in your struggle to obtain working and living conditions worthy of American freeman. So just is your cause that no mind not utterly benighted and corrupted could refuse it respect and well-wishing. But there are three things in particular which command my admiration.

First, you are conducting a non-violent movement, and this in the face of great provocation, for I understand that your leaders are hounded and persecuted by the landowners and the forces of government whom they impress into their service. They are violent, I am told, but you are controlled and restrained. They deny you your fundamental rights of speech, press and assembly, yet so strong is your cause that you are winning ground all the while.

Second, I am most happy that in the South of all places white workers are making common cause with their Negro fellows. That is splendid and as it should be and I, as a Southern white woman, applaud it more than I can possibly express. I have seen for myself that you are not merely admitting negroes into your union, but sharing leadership with them—just as you have, blacks and whites, always shared suffering and will, I hope, in the future share the fruits of this great and righteous struggle.

And lastly, I see from the copy of the "Voice" which has just come to my attention that you men are realizing that this is a woman's fight as well as a man's. The mothers, wives, daughters and sweet-

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CARPENTER AND MALCOLM TO ADDRESS ASSEMBLY

Norman Thomas Sends Message

Other Speakers Invited

The program of the 2nd Annual Convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is now completed. The first session will open at the Labor Temple in Little Rock, Friday morning, January 3rd, at 9:00 o'clock.

The Rev. Marshal Steel, Pastor of the Little Rock Methodist Church has been invited to deliver the opening address. H. M. Thackeray, Secretary of the Arkansas Federation of Labor, has been invited to address the assembly on behalf of the Arkansas Labor Movement. Norman Thomas, noted friend of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was unable to be in Little Rock but will send a prepared message to the Delegates. J. R. Butler, President of the Union will preside at the opening session.

The Friday afternoon session will be given over to discussion groups on problems facing the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Friday night it is planned to hold an open session of the Convention to which the public will be invited. Hon. Rexford G. Tugwell, Director of the Resettlement Administration and chief brain trust of the Roosevelt regime has been invited to address the meeting.

It is also planned to show motion pictures depicting life in the T. V. A. project, the sharecroppers in Arkansas and the new farming methods of the Soviet Union. This session will be held at a larger hall than that of the Labor Temple.

The Saturday morning session will be given over to business of the Union, and addresses will be given by National Organizers, Sweden of Oklahoma, Mahews of Texas, and McKinney of Missouri as well as others who wish to speak on organizational work in their respective fields.

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GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS UNABLE TO ADDRESS STFU CONVENTION

In a letter just received by the Secretary of the Union, Governor Futrell expresses regret that he can not be present to address the Assembly. The letter is as follows:

"Unless arrangements miscarry which have already been made, I can not be present at the Second Annual Convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union on January 3rd. Please accept my thanks for your invitation.

Yours sincerely,

Signed J. Marion Futrell.

UNION FORCES CHANGE NEW AAA CONTRACT

SLIGHT BENEFITS GIVEN TO TENANT AND CROPPERS

The new cotton contracts for 1936 were announced just as the December number of the Voice was going to Press. Due to the work of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union which has constantly agitated for enforcement of the meager rights given the tenants and sharecroppers, and who also demanded that payments be made in proportion to the interest in the crop, the AAA officials have increased the payments due the cropper and tenant under the new contracts.

Payments to be allowed sharecroppers are increased by about 10%. For each hundred dollars paid out by the government the landholder was given \$85.00 in 1934 and 35; the non-managing share tenant (meaning every one who furnishes his tools and teams and raises the cotton that the landholders can by hook or crook manage to get defined as a managing share tenant) was supposed to get 22½% of \$22.50 in 1934-35. This year he is to receive \$50.00 of each hundred. The sharecropper (who furnishes only his labor and that of his wife and children in raising the cotton) in 1934-35 was given \$15.00 out of every hundred. This year he will get \$25.00—(if he raises enough hell to make the government pay him instead of the landlord.)

The managing share tenants part has been cut down this year. He will be on the same basis as the regular tenant and is to receive \$50.00 of each \$100. The new contract abolishes the distinction—landholders won't have to worry about how to claim supervision over them this year. The cash renter of course will be due all of the payment (or as much as he can get the landholder to let him have). There is a provision in the contract for a Joint Payee, that is to allow the landlord to get all the money in his possession as he did the bale tags in 34 and 35. This is another "Trusteeship." Croppers and tenants who cannot read and write should designate the Union or else some honest individual as their Joint Payee so that they will be assured of getting the money. Union members should not sign these trusteeships. Sharecroppers or share tenants will not be eligible to sign the Government Contracts. They remain just as before the innocent bystanders who get shot.

In forthcoming issues of the Voice we are going to analyze the Contract paragraph by paragraph and will keep you informed of all bulletins and regulations issued by the AAA thruout the year explaining them in language you can understand.

Outside of loopholes big enough to drive a whole fleet of trucks thru giving plenty of room for unscrupulous planters to skin you out of your share, the contract is some improvement over that of 1934-35. They have definitely dropped the pretense of al-

UNKNOWN HEROES

Much of the success of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union is due to the scores of men and women who unknown to all but a few close friends went up and down the country-side spreading the Union and organizing their fellow-workers.

These brave men and women went without any commission save their loyalty to the Union and their fellow workers whom they knew were enslaved. Many of them were as heroic as any of those whose names we mention in these columns from time to time. They risked their lives as those who were known risked theirs. They asked no thanks, no help, no reward.

To these brave unknown heroes the Union owes much. We all join in saluting the unknown heroes of the STFU.

A Message To The Young Methodists

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men and children whose only crime is that they were born in the cotton raising South, into a system that is sometimes more vicious and cruel than human chattel slavery itself.

We invite you to send delegates to our convention in Little Rock to see for yourself the modern slaves of King Cotton.

YOU WILL WIN

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hearts will do their part and it is well this should be recognized.

And so with my tiny contribution (I haven't much of this world's goods, though I hope from time to time to make further small donations) goes a world of indignation for the system which exploits and oppresses you and of heartfelt hope for your ultimate success. If you remain true to your present principles of justice and courage and valiant self-discipline, of course you will win!

Sincerely yours,
Miss Francis Witherspoon

lowing the tenant and cropper the use of government rented land—rent free. On that score the tenant and cropper theoretically (supposed to be something it ain't) get less, but in actual practice it means nothing as most of our people paid rent on government land just as they always did anyhow.

Oh yes, the landholder again promises not to throw folks off the land but that is as we all know "hokey". The best part of the contract is that it shows that the "real producers of cotton," sharecroppers and tenants and other farm workers can only get consideration when they demand it. With 1,000,000 members the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union could make enough noise to get a fair contract. It is up to you to build your Union and raise plenty of Hell and you will get somewhere.

UNQUALIFIED LIARS

Questionable meetings are being held in North Eastern Arkansas. The Planters of Poinsett County are using their County Agent R. L. Magill to organize "A New Union." We have in our possession a letter bearing Magill's signature inviting sharecroppers and tenants to attend these meetings and join the organization. The letter is written on stationery headed "United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Adjustment Administration."

It is also reported that speakers claim this outfit is backed up by the United States Government. They try to get sharecroppers and tenants to join by saying that the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is lining up with them. The officials of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union want to make this plain to every one, Persons making such statements are Unqualified Liars. We have the support of the workers of the cotton fields and do not want nor would we accept an endorsement by plantation owned government officials.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is the only organization for farm workers in Northeastern Arkansas whether they be sharecroppers, tenants or day laborers. Our Union has the official endorsement of the American Federation of Labor.

H. L. Mitchell,
Executive Secretary.

CONVENTION TO HEAR NOTED SPEAKERS

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Saturday afternoon the business session will continue and the summing up of "The Program of the STFU" will be given by H. L. Mitchell. Saturday evening the Deputy Labor Commissioner of the State of Arkansas, Harry C. Malcom, will address the assembly on "The Sharecropper and the Arkansas Department of Labor."

Sunday morning will see the election of officers of the Union for 1936 and at 11 a.m. C. T. Carpenter, noted Union attorney and writer, will address the Convention on the subject "Constitutional Rights of American Citizens." The Convention will then hear addresses by the newly elected President and Secretary on the "Road Ahead!"

All sessions of the Union Convention will open with worship conducted by various ministers and singing of Union songs will be led by A. B. Brookins, Union song leader.

Heb, Ark.

Sirs:

The landlaw took all we made and brought us out in debt. I went to Forest City to the Red Cross. They wouldn't give me nothing. The day I went to Forest City I cooked my last meal I am out all I got but a pint of lard. I can't tell how hungry I am we are 6 in family. We eat parched corn when we get it.

L. P.

HEROES OF THE STFU SUPPORT YOUR UNION BY PAYING DUES Union Makes Plans for Great Growth in 1936

It is fitting that at this time The Sharecroppers' Voice should pay a very deserved tribute to H. L. Mitchell, National Secretary of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

Mitchell has been the secretary of the Union since it was first organized. When the Union was young and without influence he threw himself into the task of building it into a powerful organization. He had been a sharecropper himself and he knew the slave-ridden plantation system as most sharecroppers do. He loathed and despised the misery which the system inflicted upon the workers and he made up his mind to help abolish it.

He gave unsparingly of his time, energy and money in organizing the Union. He went about the country in his battered old automobile organizing locals. His car was usually loaded down with sharecroppers who scoured the country setting up new locals. He was among the first to feel the anger and wrath of the landlords but nothing which they did could stop Mitchell from spreading the Union.

During the time that Mitchell has been secretary the Union has grown from seventeen members in a tiny local in Poinsett County to a powerful organization with over 25,000 members in more than 200 locals concentrated in six cotton raising states. He has brought to the movement a wide experience, a talent for organization, a burning passion for justice to the oppressed sharecroppers, a rare understanding of the conditions confronting the cotton field workers and an unswerving loyalty to the Union at all times.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was fortunate in choosing Mitchell as its secretary. No man could have tried harder to do his job and we doubt if any man could have accomplished more.

Howard Kester

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union has put the sharecroppers of the South in America's mind. Through the Union thousands of people have heard about the terrible conditions under which workers in the cotton fields are forced to live. These people have helped the Union to carry on its struggle to bring justice to the Negro and white slaves of King Cotton. But if the Union is to continue its great struggle the members of the Union will have to support it more and more for we can't continue to depend on our friends to support it. Every member must pay his or her dues so we can carry on the work.

Union Sends Ambassadors To Washington

We are facing a new year. Our Union has had a remarkable growth, but it must grow even larger if we are to continue our struggle against the slavery and tyranny of the plantation system. We want to carry our fight to Washington early this year.

We want to show the AAA officials how sharecroppers and tenants have been robbed and cheated by their landlords; how they have been evicted from government rented lands; how they were refused relief if they didn't work for starvation wages; how they have been charged sky-high prices at the commissary and credit stores. We have enough evidence to send several hundred planters to jail for the rest of their lives. We must now carry our fight to Washington. Right after the Convention we want to send a delegation of Union men to the Nation's Capitol. To do this we must raise money, and we are asking that every member give their pennies for this purpose.

FLORIDA NIGHT RIDERS

Joseph Shoemaker, organizer for the Workers Alliance of America is dead. A mob of Florida thugs, seized him and two other workers in front of the police station in Tampa and carried him for a ride. All three men were tarred and feathered and beaten severely. Shoemaker died in the hospital without ever regaining consciousness. The men who committed this outrage are walking the streets of that city openly. Decent American Citizens are demanding that the authorities act. Union Locals of the STFU are requested to write to the County Sheriff of Hillsboro County, Tampa, Florida and protest this outrage against working class organizations. The Alliance is a union of the unemployed.

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Social Christian Club

Boston University School of Theology

Best wishes for your Convention
CELESTINE SMITH
Atlanta, Georgia

GREETINGS

GARDNER JACKSON
Former Assistant Consumers Counsel
Agricultural Adjustment Administration
Washington, D. C.

For peace, freedom and plenty
Y. P. S. L.
Washington, D. C.

Greetings; With best wishes
C. H. HAMLIN
Atlantic Christian College
Wilson, N. C.

GREETINGS
COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE
Mena, Arkansas

We are going to build new locals all over the South. The Union must expand everywhere there are sharecroppers and tenant farmers. We want 75,000 new members in another year. When a new member is made in the Union your job, your home, your life is made that much safer. A Union man won't take a job away from you; he won't pick cotton or work in the field at prices less than those set by the Union.

Your friend
NORMAN THOMAS
New York City

Greetings and best wishes in your heroic fight for freedom and brotherhood
MISS ELISABETH GILMAN
Committee for Economic Racial Justice
Baltimore, Md.

Greetings in your great struggle for human freedom
REV. JOHN DILLINGHAM
Lincoln Academy, Kings Mountain, N. C.

Greetings to your Convention
ELEANOR COPENHAVER
Leadership Division, National Young Women's Christian Association
New York City

Greetings to your Convention
FRANCIS A. HENSON
International Student League
New York City

Greetings to you, fellow Union members
MISS LOIS JAMISON
Washington, D. C.

Greetings to your Second Annual Convention and to all members of the STFU
CLARENCE SENIOR
Executive Secretary, Socialist Party
U. S. A.

The Religion and Labor Foundation extends greetings and continues with you in your struggle for freedom from exploitation and oppression
DR. WILLIARD E. UPHAUS
Executive Secretary, New Haven, Conn.

Continue the good work
SHARECROPPERS UNION
Birmingham, Ala.

Best wishes for your success
ALFRED BAKER LEWIS
Secretary New England SP
Boston, Mass.

All power to you Workers and Farmers
CARL BRANIN
419 St. Marys St., Dallas, Texas

Greetings; Continue your valuable work
DEVERE ALLEN
No Frontier News Service, Wilton, Conn.

Greetings; To Members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union in their struggle for economic justice
Council for Social Action of the Congregational and Christian Churches

Greetings
GALE SEAMAN
Los Angeles, California

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AAA BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT

The Agricultural Adjustment Act is now before the Supreme Court of the U. S. A. Nine old men roosting on a pole like sick chickens have the right to tell the American people how to run their business, you know. They are going to decide whether or not the American people will continue to let Secretary Wallace run things on this basis of plowing under cotton and killing pigs, so that every one will have plenty of food and clothing or whether we will go back to Hoover and let the devil take the hindmost.

While we have no respect whatever for the economy of scarcity inaugurated by the great FDR, we surely have a lot less for the nine old buzzards who decide that American citizens can't act the fool if they want to. When they make their decision known we will then know whether or not there is going to be any more AAA.

ABOLISH TENANTRY!

"Damn the whole tenant system," cried a prominent American many years ago. Before and since his time countless voices have been raised against the system which has enslaved millions of Negro and white families in the Kingdom of King Cotton.

"Since the Civil War, whether black or white, he has been the equivalent of slave labor." These words were not written by "an outside agitator." They are the seasoned thoughts of one of the South's most prominent cotton planters.

"The landlord owns the land, the tools and the mules and sometimes by an unwritten law the sharecropper himself." These are the words of a thoughtful observer of Southern life as it appears in the South in 1935.

"In the cotton fields of the South is the most stark serfdom that is left anywhere in the western world," recently wrote one of America's most prominent, respected and useful citizens.

For the first time since the Civil War Americans, North and South are becoming aroused over the terrible and oppressive conditions that exist among the cotton field workers of the South. Many Americans have been shocked and some have been aroused but that is not enough. America must grid itself for a great task. That task is the complete abolition of tenantry.

THE COTTON PICKER

Memphis, Tenn.—A good many years ago two boys worked beneath the blistering Texas sun picking cotton. As they dragged the sack behind them and bent over the cotton bolls the sweat poured from their bodies and their backs ached with pain. At night when they lay in their beds to rest from their labor they dreamed of inventing a machine which would pick cotton and do away with the grinding toil of human hands and aching backs.

The dream has at last come true. The two boys, now grown men have invented a successful cotton picking machine. The Rust Brothers have produced a machine which will some day replace all of the cotton pickers in the South.

The cotton picking machine was born out of a dream and built through idealism. The two boys had seen thousands of boys and girls, men and women broken by hard work in the cotton fields. They wanted to do something to ease their burdens and to make the world a little better place in which to raise boys and girls. The cotton picking machine will help to abolish child labor in the fields—it will help abolish practically all human cotton pickers.

The machine will pick 20 lbs. or more of cotton a minute and do in 7 and one-half hours what the average cotton picker can do in three months.

The cotton picking machine will come to the cotton fields and when it comes it will replace thousands of workers.

What is to happen to them?

Some landlords will drive their tenants from the land and use tractors for the cultivation of cotton and the cotton picking machine to pick it with. Thousands of men who now make a bare living will be without a crop, job, or home.

The future may be made a thousand times worse than the present. The only way the sharecroppers and tenant farmers and day laborers can protect themselves is by building a mighty union which will fight their battles for them and see that they have what is the rightful heritage of every farmer, land on which to live, tools and equipment with which to work and a decent home to live in.

Tenantry will be abolished when those who are ground down by it make up their minds to abolish it. The tenant farmers, sharecroppers and day laborers through their organization in the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama made America conscious of the hell and misery of the sharecropping system. They alone through their struggles will finally overthrow it. United in a great union of cotton workers we can destroy the slavery under which we live. Divided we will continue to be the slaves we are. Let every man help to build the Southern Tenant Farmers Union into a mighty movement for the liberation of King Cotton's Slaves.

Subscribe To The Voice

The Sharecroppers Voice is the only paper published in the Mississippi Valley in the interest of the Real producers of Cotton the sharecroppers tenants and farm laborers. It costs more money to have it printed. We must have more subscriptions in order to keep it going. The Rate is one dollar per year, 6 months for 50c—three months for 25c. Club Rates in clubs of 4 or more 50c per year. Send us two dollars and names and addresses of four people and we will mail the Voice out for one year 24 issues to each of them. Let the Voice of the Disinherited be heard thruout all the Southland. Use the following blank.

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YOU JUST CAN'T WIN

A Sharecropper took five bales of cotton to his planter. The planter did some owl-eyed figuring, and then told the cropper that the five bales exactly balanced his debt.

The cropper was very well pleased.

"Well, I'll make some profit this year," he said, "I still got another bale to bring in yet."

"Shucks," shouted the planter, "why didn't you tell me that before? Now I'll have to figure the account all over again to make it come out even."

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You sharecroppers have been slaves. You must be free. You have been afraid. You must be courageous. You meet to break your chains and the chains of many others. We send you greetings and pray God's blessing on you in your struggle for Justice. Many young Americans are with you.

RALPH HARLOW
 Smith College, Mass.